
DETERMINATION OF DEATH ON SCENE

PURPOSE

To identify situations when an EMT-I or EMT-P may be called upon to determine death on scene.

POLICY

An EMT-I or EMT-P may determine death on scene if pulselessness and apnea are present with any of the following criteria. The EMT-P is authorized to discontinue BLS CPR initiated at scene if a patient falls into the category of obvious death. If any ALS procedures are initiated, only the Base Hospital physician/designee may determine death in the field. In any situation where there may be doubt as to the clinical findings of the patient, BLS/CPR must be initiated and the Base Hospital contacted, per Protocol Reference #14008, Do Not Resuscitate Policy. When death is determined, the County Coroner must be notified along with the appropriate law enforcement agency.

Determination of Death Criteria

1. Decomposition.
2. Obvious signs of rigor mortis such as rigidity or stiffening of muscular tissues and joints in the body which occurs anytime after death and usually appears in the head, face and neck muscles first.
3. Obvious signs of venous pooling in dependent body parts, lividity such as mottled bluish-tinged discoloration of the skin, often accompanied by cold extremities.
3. Decapitation.
4. Incineration of the torso and/or head.
5. Massive crush injury and/or penetrating injury with evisceration or total destruction of the heart, lung and/or brain
6. Gross dismemberment of the trunk.
7. Blunt Trauma.

PROCEDURE

1. If the patient does not meet the above criteria for obvious death, appropriate interventions must be initiated.
2. All patients in ventricular fibrillation should be resuscitated and transported unless otherwise determined by the Base Hospital Physician/designee.
3. If resuscitation efforts are terminated enroute, the patient will be transported to the closest facility.
4. Most victims of electrocution, lightning, and drowning should have resuscitative efforts begun and transported to the appropriate Hospital/Trauma Center
5. Hypothermic patients should be treated per Protocol Reference #10006 Hypothermia – Severe.
6. All terminated resuscitation efforts must have an ECG attached to the patient care report per current AHA ECC guidelines.
7. All conversations with the Base Hospital must be fully documented with the name of the Base Hospital Physician who determined death, times, and instructions on the patient care report.
8. A DNR report form must be completed, if applicable per Protocol Reference #14008
9. A copy of the patient care report must be made available for the coroner.